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Project: SC Green Infrastructure Training Academy

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Project Proposal Abstract: South Carolina land use planners and local government leaders are not well-versed in the value of land conservation and ecological functions of working forests and other green spaces. The Green Infrastructure (GI) Training Academy will facilitate four, one-time geographically-based workshops that will introduce a balanced, strategic, and comprehensive approach to land conservation. Participants will learn about the need to implement sustainable land use plans by bringing diverse groups together to find common ground and to demonstrate the powerful and profitable

Project Description:

Sprawling urbanization and subsequent forest fragmentation occurring in specific areas of the state put pressure on a landowner's ability to practice all aspects of forest management. In addition, an increase in the state's population (many moving in from other parts of the country) is impacting the ability of forest landowners both private and public to maintain economically viable, sustainable working lands. These challenges coupled with the reduction in staff of the Forestry Commission and consolidation and reduction of many SC forest industry companies, have made it more critical than ever to raise awareness of the importance of trees and forests.

South Carolina land use planners and local government leaders are not well-versed in the value of land conservation and the ecological functions of working forests and other green spaces. The Green Infrastructure (GI) Training Academy will provide a framework for the introduction and dialog among land use planners, local government leaders, natural resource professionals and other stakeholders regarding the importance of and issues surrounding working forest landscapes, both in rural and interface areas of the state.

GI uses the identification, protection and long-term management of interconnected networks of open space and working lands that cross political boundaries to promote strategic conservation. The training format will focus on one-time geographically-based workshops that will introduce a balanced, strategic, and comprehensive approach to land conservation. The four geographic areas of the state identified for these academies are listed in order of project priority: Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester-Jasper counties, Anderson-Greenville-Spartanburg counties, Horry-Georgetown-Florence counties, Augusta, GA-Aiken-Lexington-Richland counties and possibly York-Mecklenburg, NC counties. By conducting the academies geographically we will be able to address land management challenges specific to each region. These Training Academy locations were chosen because of development pressure and continuous sprawl, forest fragmentation, wildfire risk, air quality levels and critical watershed retention. These academies will blend not only a diverse audience but also incorporate an array of natural resource management issues such as wildland fire occurrences, prescribed burning, invasive pests and plants, and critical forest lands as identified in the Southern Forest Land Assessment. Both North Carolina and Georgia forestry agency personnel will be invited to participate in the academy locations bordering their respective states.

Potential partners identified in assisting with the planning, coordinating and hosting of these academies include the Municipal Association of SC (MASC), SC Association of Counties (SCAC), SC Chapter of the American Planning Association, the Council of Governments (COG) and various SC Forestry Commission program personnel in each geographical region. For each regional academy location the primary target audience will be municipal and county government personnel, local Land Trusts, and COGs. These are the most important groups to integrate with natural resource personnel because of their substantial influence on land policies (see Appendix A for a complete list of potential stakeholders and participants). The proposed length of each training academy will be 2.5 days with a maximum capacity of about 50 participants for a total of 200 attendees and 3,000 seat hours. Scholarships will be offered (maximum of \$150/person) for participants needing assistance with lodging and/or travel.

We propose that The Conservation Fund's *Conservation Leadership Network* be contracted to conduct these regionally-based training academies. The Conservation Fund is a national leader in bringing diverse groups together to find common ground and real-life solutions (see Appendix B for more information on The Conservation Fund).

### Project Evaluation Criteria:

The GI Training Academy project is designed to benefit the forest in the following ways:

#### National Relevance

Conserve Working Forest Landscapes / Protect Forests from Harm / Enhance Benefits Associated with Trees & Forests

The Training Academy will incorporate balanced conservation solutions that emphasize the integration of economic and environmental goals. By raising participants' knowledge and level of awareness regarding the value and importance of trees and forests, they will be better equipped to facilitate strategic conservation solutions that can lead to responsible land use planning decisions where working forest landscapes exist.

#### Regional Relevance:

Fractured Forests / Wildland Fire and Forest Fuels / Changing Forest Products Markets / Forest Health / Water & Air Quality

Each one of these regional concerns will be woven into the training academy agenda and their significance addressed relative to the geographic location of the training sessions.

Prioritization - These Training Academy locations were chosen because of development pressure and continuous sprawl, forest fragmentation, wildfire risk, air quality levels and critical watershed retention.

Meaningful Scale - By designing these Training Academies based on regional issues within geographical locations the academy participants will learn, discuss and problem solve across various jurisdictional boundaries (city, county, regional and possibly state).

Collaboration - In order for this project to be successful and effective, a wide array of local, regional, state and national partners will be invited to participate on the planning committee as well as in the actual training. Potential partners identified in assisting with the planning, coordinating and hosting of these academies include but are not limited to those listed in the description above and in Appendix B.

Outcomes - Proposed outcomes include but are not limited to:

- 1) A better understanding on behalf of the participants regarding the value of land conservation and the ecological functions of working forests and other green spaces. A pre- and post-training test will be given to each participant to gauge the effectiveness of the training.
- 2) Face-to-face introductions between and interactions with natural resource managers, land use planners, government leaders and others. Training academy participants will be encouraged to continue networking beyond this workshop and each participant will be provided with the workshop roster.
- 3) Participants in each of the regional locations will be encouraged to use the information gained and begin development of a GI plan after the training session. A possible follow-up component of this grant project would be to offer seed money in the form of matching grants for the specific development of regional GI plans.

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Project Evaluation Criteria Continued:

Technology – The actual implementation of these training academies do not lend themselves to the use of geospatial technology. However, this form of technology will be utilized during the sessions to demonstrate the overlapping effects of urbanization in relation to air and water quality, forest fragmentation, wildfire occurrence, etc. Examples include the Southern Forest Land Assessment, the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment, SC air quality overlay maps and SC critical watershed management unit maps.

Integrated Delivery - Partners identified in assisting with the planning, coordinating, hosting and participation in these training academies include a host of municipal, county, regional, state and national entities, both private and public. The training format will tap into the broad cross-section of perceptions and knowledge to help raise the level of awareness of the public benefit of trees and forests with the stakeholders because of their substantial influence on land policies.

Leverage - Through the collaborative partnerships that will be formed as project implementation proceeds, the investment of the federal funds will be leveraged with public and private funds and in-kind time.

Influence Positive Change - The GI Training Academies will establish connections between natural resource managers, land use planners, government leaders and others, help raise the level of awareness of the public benefit of trees and forests and provide the impetus to work in tandem regarding land use policies that affect forested lands.

Timelines -

Winter / spring 2008 – Contract with professional firm to conduct the Training Academies. Contact and collaborate with partners. Plan Training Academy logistics, mailings, brochures, etc.

Summer 2008 - Conduct first Training Academy and evaluate efficiency and effectiveness of the Training Academy and make adjustments for the next Training Academy.

October 2008 - Contact and collaborate with partners for second training session. Plan Training Academy logistics, mailings, brochures, etc.

April 2009 - Conduct second Training Academy and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the session. Make adjustments as needed for the next Training Academy.

May 2009 - Contact and collaborate with partners for third training session. Plan Training Academy logistics, mailings, brochures, etc.

September 2009 - Conduct third Training Academy and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the session. Make adjustments as needed for the next Training Academy.

October 2009 - Contact and collaborate with partners for fourth training session. Plan Training Academy logistics, mailings, brochures, etc.

April 2010 - Conduct fourth Training Academy and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the session.

May 2010 - Begin project proposal wrap-up.

## APPENDIX A

### Potential stakeholders and participants

Municipal and county planners, elected officials, and fire staff  
SC Forestry Commission  
SC Forestry Association  
Land Trusts and local NGO's  
USDA Forest Service – Frances Marion National Forest  
USDA - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)  
SC Chamber of Commerce and local Chambers  
Council of Governments (COG)  
SC Dept. of Transportation (SCDOT)  
SC Emergency Management Division (SCEMD)  
Municipal Association of SC (MASC)  
SC Association of Counties (SCAC)  
SC Chapter of the American Planning Association (SCAPA)  
Clemson University and Strom Thurmond Institute  
Home Builders Association of SC  
The Nature Conservancy  
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)  
SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC)  
SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR)  
SC Dept of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT)  
SC Association of Realtors  
SC Fire Fighters Association and local rural fire departments  
Local civic organizations and homeowners' associations  
Local universities and colleges

## APPENDIX B

### The Conservation Fund

[www.conservationfund.org](http://www.conservationfund.org)

#### America's Partner in Conservation

The Conservation Fund is the nation's foremost environmental nonprofit dedicated to protecting America's most important landscapes and waterways for future generations. The Conservation Fund pioneers a balanced, non-advocacy, non-membership approach to conservation, one that blends environmental and economic goals and objectives. Since its founding in 1985, the Fund has helped its partners safeguard wildlife habitat, working farms and forests, community greenspace, and historic sites totaling nearly 6 million acres nationwide.

#### Our Mission

The Conservation Fund forges partnerships to conserve America's legacy of land and water resources. Through land acquisition, sustainable programs and leadership training, the Fund and its partners demonstrate balanced conservation solutions that emphasize the integration of economic and environmental goals.

**Protecting America's Land Legacy:** Central to our mission, The Conservation Fund partners with government agencies and nonprofit organizations to acquire and conserve land across the country—forever protecting wildlife habitat, working landscapes, recreation areas, community green space and historic sites.

**Strengthening Conservation in Local Communities:** The Fund works with the public and private sectors to demonstrate sustainable solutions to complex natural resource issues through land-use planning, natural resource-based economic development and the application of innovative scientific research and technology.

**Training the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders:** The Conservation Leadership Network is a strategic alliance of non-governmental and public and private sector partners dedicated to building the capacity of professionals and organizations involved in natural and cultural resource conservation. It represents a new vehicle for strengthening the American conservation community and mainstreaming conservation into the work of non-traditional partners through courses, workshops, seminars and conferences. Launched by the Fund and its partners in 1998, the Conservation Leadership Network has provided training on topics such as green infrastructure, conservation GIS, balancing nature and commerce, fundraising, land stewardship, organizational management and leadership skills.

#### The Fund in Action, Across the Nation

In the Southeast, across low-lying cypress swamps, southern Appalachian forests and varied cultural landscapes, The Conservation Fund has pioneered strategies that bring together diverse interests to achieve conservation goals. From smart growth and land conservation initiatives to the largest U.S. carbon sequestration project to the country's first African-American land trust/community development organization; the Fund demonstrates continuing leadership in creative conservation practices. Since 1985, the Fund has protected more than 715,000 acres throughout the Southeast - preserving more than 20,000 acres in 2005.